

Information About Meningitis

Indiana State Law IC 20-30-5-18 requires that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of all students about meningitis and the vaccines available to prevent one type of this serious illness at the beginning of each school year.

One type of meningitis is caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Infections caused by this bacterium are serious, and may lead to death. Symptoms of an infection with *Neisseria meningitidis* may include a high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, confusion and a rash. This disease can become severe very quickly and often leads to deafness, mental retardation, loss of arms or legs and even death. The bacteria are spread from close person to person contact through the exchange of nose and throat secretions, by activities such as kissing or sharing eating or drinking utensils. The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

There are two vaccines that can help prevent cases of this disease in teens and young adults. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination of children with the meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra and Menveo) at 11 or 12 years of age, with a booster dose of the vaccine at 16 years of age. The booster dose at age 16 provides ongoing protection from the disease after high school.

The state of Indiana requires all students in grades 6-12 to have the appropriate number of meningococcal conjugate vaccine doses. One dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine is required for all students in 6th -11th grade. A second booster dose is required for students entering 12th grade. These vaccines are a legal requirement for school entry (Indiana Administrative Code 410 IAC 1-1-1) for the current school year.

All students in grades 6-12 must have acceptable documentation of required immunizations on record at the school they are currently attending. An acceptable record includes a signed record from the child's health care provider indicating the name of the vaccine given and the date it was given, a record of the immunization in the state immunization registry (CHIRP) prior to the start of the school year, or a record from another school showing the required immunizations have been given.

Many local health departments and private healthcare providers offer this vaccine. Please contact your health care provider for specific instructions regarding your child.

Additional information about meningococcal disease can be found at:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/index.html>

IN State Department of Health website:

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/25455.htm>

QUICK FACTS ABOUT MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

What is Meningococcal Disease?

Neisseria meningitidis bacteria are found in the nose and throat of 10 – 15% of healthy adults. Rarely, the bacteria can enter areas of the body where bacteria are normally not found, such as the blood or fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and cause a severe, life-threatening infection (“invasive disease”) known as meningococcal disease.

How is Meningococcal Disease spread?

The disease is not spread by casual contact or by attending the same work or school setting. *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria are spread from person to person only through direct contact with an infected person’s nose or throat secretions, including saliva, 1 week before the onset of symptoms. Some common ways the bacteria can be spread from an infected person are:

- Living the same household
- Kissing on the lips
- Sharing drinks from the same container (glasses, cups, water bottles)
- Sharing eating with utensils (forks and spoons)
- Sharing a toothbrush, cigarettes or lipstick

Preventive antibiotic therapy is recommended for individuals identified to be close contacts of someone who is sick with the disease.

Who is at risk for Meningococcal Disease?

Young infants and students attending high school or college and military recruits are more likely to get the disease. Individuals with a weakened immune system are also at higher risk for the disease as well as those who live in crowded dwellings or have household exposure to cigarette smoke.

What are the signs of being sick with Meningococcal Disease?

Symptoms of meningococcal disease include:

- Fever (abrupt onset)
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Skin rash that appears as bruising or bleeding under the skin
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to light

In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify but may include:

- Fever
- Fretfulness or irritability
- Poor appetite
- Difficulty in waking the baby

How is meningococcal disease diagnosed?

If you have any of the above symptoms, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. An infected person may become sick within a few hours of developing symptoms and early diagnosis. Your health care provider may collect blood or perform a spinal tap to obtain spinal fluid to see if meningococcal bacteria are present.

How can Meningococcal Disease be treated?

Meningococcal disease is treated with several different types of antibiotics, and early treatment may reduce the risk of complications or death from the disease. A 24-hour course of antibiotic therapy reduces a person's likelihood of spreading the bacteria. Supportive care in an intensive care unit may be necessary for those with severe infection and surgery may be needed to remove damaged tissue and stop the spread of infection.

How is Meningococcal Disease prevented?

Meningococcal disease can be prevented by good hygiene. Cover the nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, throw away used tissues, and wash hands often. Do not share eating or drinking utensils with anyone.

Is there a vaccine that can prevent this disease?

There are two vaccines that protect against most types of this disease. See your health care provider about which one is right for you. A dose of meningococcal vaccine is recommended for children and adolescents 11 through 18 years of age. Meningococcal vaccine is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease:

- College freshmen living in dormitories
- U. S. military recruits
- Travelers to countries where meningococcal disease is common, such as parts of Africa
- Anyone with a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed
- Persons with certain medical conditions that affect their immune system (check with your physician)
- Microbiologists who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria

For information on the availability of meningococcal vaccine contact your family physician or local health department. Revaccination after 5 years may be indicated for certain at-risk individuals

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Centers for Diseases and Control Prevention (CDC) meningitis website at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/index.html>